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ABSTRACT

A study sought to determine whether there is any relationship between a child's classroom behavior and his or her perceptions of the teacher as being "cool" or "uncool." Observations were conducted of five middle school students exhibiting chronic behavior problems. Students were surveyed as to which teachers they regarded as "cool" and "uncool" and why; observations of each child with his or her "cool" and "uncool" teachers were conducted. Teachers were also surveyed as to classroom behavior. Findings indicated that in four out of five cases, students showed marked behavior improvement when they were with a "cool" teacher. In one of five cases there was no observable difference in behavior. No cases showed improvement in behavior with an "uncool" teacher. It was found that in order to be perceived as "cool" by a student, and thus experience fewer behavior problems, it was important for teachers to develop a positive, close relationship with students, and to show the students that they were cared about. (HTH)

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ED 419 627

How Are the Classroom Behaviors of Students with Chronic Behavior Problems Related to Their Perceptions of Teacher "Coolness?"

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to try and determine whether there is any relationship between a child's classroom behavior and their perception of their teacher as being "cool" or "uncool." The study focuses on children who display chronic behavior problems. The study was done in an attempt to find out whether students would get into more or less trouble if they were with a teacher which, for whatever reason, they found to be "cool." We determined this through observations and teacher surveys. We found that in four out of five cases, students show marked improvement when they are with a "cool" teacher. In one out of five cases there was no observable difference in behavior. No cases showed improvement in behavior with an "uncool" teacher. In order to be perceived as "cool" by a student and as a result not have as many behavior problems, we found that it is important for teachers to develop a positive, close relationship with students, and to show them that they are cared about.

Introduction

One of the challenges we faced as student teachers was to reach those students that have been labeled as "hopeless" because of their ongoing history of getting into trouble. Nevertheless, we found that working with these students was one of the most rewarding experiences in our teaching associateship. In preparation for this study, we focused specifically on at-risk "troublemakers" and examined our relationships with them. We found that in our classrooms, at-risk students were surprisingly on-task and were less likely to be disruptive. Although these students still maintained an out-going and loud personality, they exhibited more self-control and were more willing to settle down when asked. Both of us also found that building a positive and meaningful relationship with these students came naturally for us. Looking back, we felt that we were both successful in dealing with difficult students and we wanted to know why.

Was it about us or our situation that enabled such a positive relationship with seemingly untouchable students? Was it because we were both males? Was it because of our youth and our awareness of their pop culture? Was it our sense of humor? Was it simply because we were new? If you ask our students, they will quickly respond that we were just so "cool." Although there is existing literature on the common qualities of successful teachers who teach at-risk students, we have not come across one that cites the student's perception of the coolness of their teacher as one of those qualities. Nevertheless, we felt that there was a basic truth in the rationale that being perceived as a "cool" teacher has enabled us to reach at-risk students and help them to improve academically, socially, and emotionally.

Therefore our study was an attempt to see whether a pattern did exist between a student's perception of the teacher's "coolness" and their behavior in that teacher's class.

Methods

Participants

Once we figured out what our field project would encompass, we needed to find the best possible group of students and teachers. We considered various issues such as race, gender, age, socioeconomic background, and personality types. Realizing that the scope of the project could be as large, or as small, as we wanted, we decided to limit the scope to a certain type of student.

We decided to focus on middle school (sixth to eighth grade) children. Both of us had worked extensively with middle school students in our student teaching placements, and both of us are interested in teaching middle school in the future. This made the project more applicable to our own situations.

We still did not feel that we had limited the scope of our study enough. Since a major piece of our study focuses on behavior problems, it made perfect sense to us to observe students who cause major behavior problems.

This made sense to us for several reasons. First of all, many children behave well for any teacher, regardless of how "cool" or "uncool" they are perceived to be. These children would not be beneficial to study because it would be unlikely that we could observe any relationship at all between their perception of their teacher and their in-class behavior. The second reason that we decided to focus on chronic "troublemakers" is that we had very limited opportunities to observe, and chronic "troublemakers" are more likely than occasional "troublemakers" to perform observable behavior while we were in the classroom. It is easier to see contrasts when the behaviors are more extreme.

Once we decided on what kind of students we wanted to study , we had to pick a specific school in which to observe. We had both taught, and developed relationships, with students and faculties in two local middle schools. We decided to carry out our project at BMS because it was

geographically closer to us, which made scheduling a good deal easier. BMS also has a more diverse student body and faculty, and it has a wider range of socioeconomic classes.

Specifically, we chose to do our study in the seventh grade at BMS. These students were not familiar to either of us, so we would create fewer distractions in the classrooms. The teachers on the seventh grade team at BMS also helped to persuade our decision. Out of all of the grades in either of the potential middle schools, the seventh grade at BMS had the most diverse group of teachers. They had a good mix of age, race, years of experience, and, most importantly, teaching styles. We hoped that this would create more diversity in our study, especially in the perceptions that different students had of different teachers.

Now that we had narrowed down the school, grade, and general type of student in which to study, we could begin planning the actual field project itself.

Materials

For materials, we really did not require many for the field project that we designed. We were mostly doing an observational study, so we did not need any technology, books, or equipment. Our only real materials came in the form of surveys. We distributed surveys to both the students and the teachers. This required little more than simple word processing, photocopying, and administering a few pencils for the participants being surveyed.

Procedures

It took us several meetings to finally decide on the exact procedures of our project. We discussed many issues in trying to devise the most effective and efficient study that we could in the limited amount of time we were given. Several difficult topics of discussion included: should the study be qualitative or quantitative; the appropriate number of students to observe; how

many observations we should make; and who would be the participants in our study.

After finalizing our plans, we sent letters to the administration and faculty at BMS introducing our plan. We asked teachers in the seventh grade for permission to carry out the study in their classrooms. They all agreed and seemed excited about the idea. We did not want to tell them the exact nature of our study for fear of unnatural behavior during our observations. They did not mind the secrecy.

We then sent letters to all of the seventh grade teachers requesting a list of all of the chronic "troublemakers" in their classrooms. These were students who caused constant disruptions during class, and/or had been written up an abnormally high number of times for behavior. We asked that they not include any children who had already been labeled ED, LD, ADHD, ADD, or any other behavioral or emotional disorder. Neither of us are trained in special education, and we were not sure how reliable our observations would be if we used special education children.

We obtained a compiled list of twenty-five students from the teachers. Most of the teachers had met with each other to discuss which children to include. All of the students on the list were constant behavior problems for at least one teacher, but most likely they were problems in several or all of their classes. Surprisingly, the students were very diverse when it came to race, gender, and even socioeconomic class.

The next step was to obtain the class schedules of all twenty-five children from the guidance office. They were very accommodating to us and they let us use their computers to access the students' schedules immediately. We spent the next several days colluding with teachers about students' schedules. We organized times to pull these students out of their classrooms and administer surveys to them.

The surveys (see appendix) began with a brief paragraph telling the students who we

were and what we would be doing over the next several weeks. We stressed secrecy and made them agree not to tell anyone, especially their teachers, about what questions were asked on the surveys. The survey itself was composed of five simple questions:

1. - What is your definition of a "cool" person? What makes someone "cool"?

2. - Who is the "coolest" teacher that you have in the seventh grade this year?

3. - Explain to us why this teacher is so "cool." Please be as specific as possible.

4. - Who is the most "uncool" teacher that you have in the seventh grade this year?

5. - Explain to us why this teacher is so "uncool." Please be as specific as possible.

We also left an additional space for them to write their name.

We felt that these questions were the most simplistic way of getting the information we wanted. We wanted to know what the students considered "cool" to mean. This did not end up figuring greatly into the results of our study, but at the time we thought that it might have proved important in selecting which of the twenty-five students to observe. We wanted to throw out any surveys that differed vastly, but this situation never really arose.

We also wanted to know which teacher the students found to be "cool" and "uncool." The only true way to find that information was to ask. We also wanted to know their rationalization. We tended not to use surveys that based teacher coolness on the amount of homework given because we did not feel that this led to perceptions of the teachers' personalities.

To administer the surveys, we had to walk around the school while the students were in core classes and pull them out of class. The teachers and students were more than willing to cooperate and each child took about five to ten minutes on the survey. We managed to collect eighteen of the twenty-five surveys on the first day. We went back two days later and collected five more. The remaining two students had chronic truancy problems so we decided to scratch them from the pool of possible subjects.

Next came the arduous task of narrowing down the twenty-three students to a workable number. We had originally planned on studying ten children, but with our time constraints, we decided on a smaller number. Five seemed to us a very workable number, and this allowed us to observe the students more times each and to do a more in-depth analysis of their behavior patterns.

Choosing which five students to take was rather trying. We wanted a diverse group of students so that the study's scope was not limited to a specific race, class, or gender. We also wanted a good mix of teachers. We did not want to observe the same teachers for every child. After much deliberation we settled on our five students. Three of the students were boys while two were girls, and three of the students were black while two were white. We also chose six different teachers listed as "cool" or "uncool." We will refer to the five students as RD, JJ, LT, LL, and MA.

We quickly made a rough schedule of which days and times we could do our observations. This was important because we did not want to show up to observe the same class at the same time. We also did not want to observe a student on the same day because children can have very on- and off-task days. This meant having more actual days of observing.

We also had to decide exactly what we would do for the observations. We had already agreed that we both would observe all five students with their "cool" and "uncool" teachers. This meant ten observations each, and twenty over all. This needed to be accomplished in roughly three weeks. The students of the seventh grade at BMS switch classes every marking period, so we would no longer be able to observe them with the same teachers after three weeks.

We also needed to make sure that our observations were consistent between us. We concluded that each observation should last twenty minutes. That meant that we could do two observations in one class period if necessary. We did detailed descriptive narratives of

everything that we saw pertaining to the observed students. We even included things that had little or nothing to do with their behavior. We wanted to paint as detailed a picture of the classroom as possible to make it easier to recall events when determining the overall results of the project.

Scheduling proved to be a much more formidable task than we had foreseen. On many occasions we came back from observation trips empty handed. This was due to student absences, teacher absences, testing, assemblies, field trips, schedule changes, and school cancellations due to flooding. The third week was very hectic when it came to scheduling observations. Luckily the teachers were very accommodating and made every effort to aid us in our project.

We did three weeks of observations and we nearly had every observation that we needed. We did not get two observations for JJ or LL with their "uncool" teachers. We also could not observe MA with his "cool" teacher because he was no longer in his class. We did not notice this discrepancy until it was too late to get another subject. Considering the various setbacks and time constraints, we felt very satisfied with the amount of observations that we accomplished.

However, we still did not feel that these observations were enough. No matter how in-depth our observations were, they still did not paint an accurate picture of the students' typical classroom behaviors. It was this realization, coupled with the lack of observations for several students, that led us to decide on surveying the teachers about the typical classroom behaviors of the observed children.

We asked the six teachers for permission to hand them brief surveys. They all agreed to complete them as fast as they could. The surveys had just two questions:

1. Please describe _____ typical behavior in your class.

2. Is there anything in your class environment that you attribute these behaviors to?

We really wanted to know how well the students generally behaved for each individual teacher. We also wanted to see if the teachers could pick anything specific from their classrooms or their teaching styles that may have contributed to the students' behaviors (on- or off-task). We collected every survey except for MA's "uncool" teacher's survey.

This really concluded our time at BMS. We had collected surveys from students, collected surveys from teachers, and completed many observations. We had gathered all the data. All that was left to do was to analyze the data, and draw conclusions and recommendations from our findings.

In discussing how to analyze our data, we decided on a two-part process. We would begin by drawing up results from specific students. We would look at the teacher survey and the observations for a specific student with their "cool" teacher and try to trace some discernible patterns from the data. We would then do the same with the teacher survey and the observations for that same student with their "uncool" teacher. After patterns were found between the specific student's behavior with both teachers, we would compare the two sets of data and try and determine any similarities or contrasts. We would look for these similarities or contrasts between behaviors with the two teachers for each student, thus developing five separate case studies.

Once the results for each student had been concluded, we could move on to the second half of our data analysis. We wanted to find trends amongst the five case studies. We looked at the similarities and differences for each individual's behavior, and we looked for a pattern among all five of the students. If the students consistently showed better or worse behaviors for their "cool" and "uncool" teachers, then a possible, transferable relationship could be supposed. If the students did not consistently show better or worse behaviors, then a relationship would seem much less likely. Only after these analyses were completed, could we offer any kind of

recommendation about what types of teachers or teaching styles most benefit chronic "troublemakers", if any in fact do.

The individual case results and analyses, followed by the larger, multi-subject analyses, make up the next portion of this paper.

Results for RD

Observations

RD had perhaps the most dramatic differences between his "cool" and "uncool" teachers during the class sessions that we observed. His observations with his "uncool" teacher were very similar, as were his observations with his "cool" teacher, but the observations differed greatly between the two classrooms.

With his "uncool" teacher, we noticed that RD was constantly off-task. He exhibited behaviors that are often associated with boredom such as doodling, making noises, and staring off into space. During one observation, it took RD a great deal of time to stop doodling and get to work. In the other observation, students were given presentations about stories they had read. He constantly tapped his feet and twitched his pencil while the students were trying to talk.

He was also rude to students in one of the "uncool" class observations. He was immediately sent out of the room for making an inappropriate comment to one of his neighbors. Also, one of his classmates was having trouble answering a question that RD apparently knew the answer to. He snickered at the student for not knowing the answer.

Our observations also showed similar interactions between RD and his "uncool" teacher. As mentioned earlier, he was sent out of the room immediately after making a comment to another student that was too quiet for most to hear. He was left in the hallway for five minutes while another student gave their presentation. Once the teacher brought RD back in, she sat right

next to him for the remainder of the class. Their interactions were brief and seemed unfriendly.

The other observation with his "uncool" teacher also showed a brief and unfriendly set of interactions between RD and the teacher. He was told the assignment at the beginning of the class, but he did not begin working on it. The teacher told RD that he had "to start writing." He continued to doodle and the teacher was forced to point out that he had not even started. Again she had to tell him to get to work. Finally, he began his assignment.

The observations of RD with his "cool" teacher gave a completely different picture of RD as a student. He seemed like a different person. He was perhaps the most on-task student in the entire class.

He never seemed restless or bored with his "cool" teacher. He came to class prepared and he was an active volunteer. He raised his hand for questions that were not even asked directly to him, and he was the first person to volunteer to move seats when they had to change their seating arrangements. He was very engaged in his assignments. He actively took part in a math question session, and he worked diligently on a computer during one of the sessions. His hard work paid off for him as well because he got a 100% on a pre-quiz, which meant he did not have to take the actual quiz.

RD was also extremely polite in this class, both to his teacher and the other students. He apologized for being late to class because he had taken attendance. He said hello to everyone. He even said goodbye to everyone, including us. He raised his hand and did not make one rude remark. Some other children were joking around, but he merely listened and did not take part.

RD also seemed to have a great relationship with his "cool" teacher. Not only was he polite to her, but he really listened to her. She responded by really showing that she cared about him. During one observation, he answered a question wrong and she tried to draw the correct answer out of him through further questioning. He finally answered correctly. She also used a

very friendly tone with RD and she constantly used supportive terms like "wow" and "good job."

Surveys

The teacher surveys showed just as much disparity as the observations. The "uncool" teacher wrote brief, to-the-point responses. She mentioned that RD "will sit in class and not open a book, notebook, or take out a pencil/pen." She states also that he will make noises to try and draw attention to himself. She credits this to the fact that he has a lot of friends in the class that he wants to impress. RD is easily provoked and persuaded to act out. She also wrote that RD "will draw attention and seek acceptance from others and jeopardize himself in the process."

The survey from RD's "cool" teacher could not be more different. The first thing she says is that RD "behaves well in 8th pd. math class. He comes to class early, has all materials and homework." She goes on to mention that he participates in a positive manner, helps others when he finishes early, and is a very pleasant person to teach. She also wrote a long paragraph explaining that her class is based on order, hands-on activities, and student ownership of the class.

Conclusions

Looking at the observations and the surveys, a dramatic difference can be drawn between RD's behavior with his "cool" and "uncool" teachers. This seems to stem from the personal relationships between these teachers and RD.

He behaved extremely poorly for his "uncool" teacher. He was restless, mildly disruptive, and extremely disrespectful to the other students. The behavior descriptions of the teacher survey were seen clearly during the observations. This is especially true when it came to

him not getting any work done. He clearly wanted to draw more attention to himself.

He behaved like a model student for his "cool" teacher. She wrote that he is very pleasant, and that is exactly what we experienced during our observations. He came to class prepared, he volunteered often, and he did his work quickly and thoroughly. He did not try to draw any extra attention to himself, and he was polite. These behaviors are far from the behaviors seen with the "uncool" teacher.

Perhaps the most dramatic difference was the teacher-student interactions. The only interactions RD had with his "uncool" teacher were brief and disciplinary in nature. His interactions with his "cool" teacher were much more personal and supportive. It is clear from his behaviors that he really liked the teacher who cared about his performance in her classroom.

For RD, the results are clear. He benefits greatly from being with the teacher that he perceives to be "cool." He behaves, works hard, and is much more pleasant to everyone when he is working with the teacher that he finds "cool."

Results for JJ

Observations

Our observations of JJ are slightly different from our observations of RD. We saw two completely different types of lessons during his time with his "cool" teacher. Luckily, his behaviors showed a definite trend in that class. Our data on JJ with his "uncool" teacher are not as complete due to the fact that we only got to observe him once in that class. This was due to various scheduling ordeals and the fact that all of the students changed classes after a certain date.

As mentioned earlier, we could only get one observation of JJ with his "uncool" teacher. This observation however was fairly revealing when it came to getting a good glimpse of his behavior in that class. He did not behave terribly, but he was generally off-task throughout the

period. He did not leave his seat when people were supposed to walk around and find partners. Instead, he talked with a friend about an unrelated topic. He constantly spun a piece of paper on his desk as if he were bored. He did not appear to do any work at all. The room was extremely loud, but most of the students were talking about an assigned worksheet. JJ did not even attempt to do the work sheet for a long time.

His interactions with the teacher were few, and brief in nature. For most of the period, his teacher was dealing with other students and did not interact with JJ at all. She collected a study guide from him, and she also finally said "You of all people need extra credit." Overall there was little interaction between JJ and his "uncool" teacher throughout the entire period, and those that did occur where short and not very friendly in nature.

He behaved very well during both observations with the "cool" teacher. Although the class was engaged in two completely different activities during the two observations, JJ's on-task behavior was constant. During the first observation, the class was watching a video on volcanoes, which was related to the unit they were doing. JJ was sitting down and watching the video intently the entire time. He barely moved an inch. During a brief bathroom break, he told his "cool" teacher that he did not write anything down because he was "so into the video." He returned on time from his bathroom break and sat intently for the rest of the period. His teacher commented that JJ was really "into it" that day.

The second observation took place on a day that involved much more activity. The class was playing a game in teams and JJ was playing a very active role in the game. This was a big shift from the motionless JJ of the prior observation. He seemingly took over as the vocal leader of his team, and he actively watched the video presented before the questioning part of the game began. He purposely tried to mislead the other teams by whispering out-loud the wrong answers. Throughout the class period, he joked around with the rest of the class. However, he

was consistently on-task. JJ had a lot of energy, but he focused it all on the task assigned by the teacher.

His interactions with his "cool" teacher were also very friendly. It seemed as if JJ really was interested in the subject and in what his teacher had to say. He sought out the teacher when he wanted to converse with him, and their interactions were always friendly. The "cool" teacher seemed to genuinely like JJ and did not have to discipline him once during either observation.

Surveys

The surveys for JJ matched the observations nearly perfectly. His "uncool" teacher wrote fairly long responses to the questions on the survey. She begins by saying that JJ "is generally well-behaved although quite social and distractible." She also goes on to mention that he has definite peaks and valleys in his performance. He seems much more on-task on the days that he is prepared, but during the days that he comes unprepared, he is much more of a concern. She also points out that JJ is very quick to place the blame for his misbehaviors elsewhere and he often refuses to shoulder any responsibilities for his actions. She says that the class as a whole "is a good one, though sociable, but once they settle in to work, only a few have to be refocused. [JJ] would be one of those."

His "cool" teacher wrote very brief responses, but they match our observations greatly. He remarks that JJ "sits and listens, is not a problem." He claims that JJ is an audio learner and that he needs reinforcement this way. As for behavior, there is little or not reinforcement needed.

Conclusions

Although not as drastic as the one seen with RD, a definite trend can be spotted separating JJ's behavior in the two classes. Like with RD, there is also a noticeable difference in

the interactions of JJ with his "cool" and "uncool" teachers.

He was not terrible with his "uncool" teacher, but he was much more off-task with her than he was with his "cool" teacher. He was very social, and this seemed to interfere with his ability to do his work. It took him much longer to begin assignments. The teacher mentioned that his performance on assignments constantly went through a series of peaks and valleys. He also was unprepared often with his "uncool" teacher.

He was always prepared, and always involved in his "cool" teacher's class. He eagerly worked on assignments and was never disruptive. One observation definitely showed his social side, but he could channel his energy and his attention to the task at hand.

His interest level and his relationship with the two teachers were also very dissimilar. He did not seem anxious to work on the assignments given by his "uncool" teacher. They also rarely interacted during our observation. The few times that the teacher did talk to him, she was very brief, impersonal, and her comments were slightly scornful in nature. JJ did not seek out interaction with her at all.

His interest level on the assignments given by his "cool" teacher was very high. He sat completely motionless through two videos, with his eyes glued to the screen. He also actively participated in a class wide game. He sought out the teacher, and the teacher responded with friendly, personal responses. The teacher never saw fit to reprimand JJ, because JJ was always very on-task.

For JJ, the results are also as clear. Although his behavior was not terrible for either teacher, there was a noticeable shift between the two. He was always on-task for the teacher he perceived to be "cool", while he needed refocusing with the teacher he perceived to be "uncool."

Results for LL

Observations

Our observations for LL are very interesting. At first glance, they may not appear that different, but at a closer look one can see glaring differences between her behaviors in the two classes. As usual, two observations were done with her "cool" teacher, but due to scheduling problems (the same ones as with JJ) we only could get one observation of her with her "uncool" teacher.

During the observation of LL with her "uncool" teacher, the observer was made aware of the fact that LL was unprepared to make a presentation that she was scheduled to make. She, therefore, was going to be working on it for the period. Although she was not genuinely off-task, she spoke loudly to her friends and to the teacher, and she walked around the room without permission to get help on her assignment from her friends.

The most noticeable parts of the observation were her interactions with her "uncool" teacher. LL asked her teacher for help near the very beginning of class. She seemed frustrated. Their conversation was hard to hear, but the tone definitely was not friendly. LL then went and asked her friends for help, apparently not satisfied with the help that her teacher gave her.

It was at this point when LL's teacher walked out of the room without telling the class where she was going. LL needed more help and shouted out very loudly "Where's Mrs. ["uncool" teacher]?" LL then walked out of the room yelling the same question. She ended up asking her friends for help again. The teacher came back in five minutes and immediately took up LL's assignment. LL explained that she only had two problems left, but the teacher took it up anyway. LL had an upset expression on her face and in a serious manner stated "That's messed up!" The teacher simply walked away. LL did not pay attention to anything the teacher said for the rest of the period, and she packed up her things eight minutes early.

The observations with her "cool" teacher were very similar to one another. LL was still loud and impulsive, as with her "uncool" teacher, but she had an entirely different attitude. At first glance, she still seemed off-task. She flirted and talked without permission. She also demanded a lot of attention from the teacher. She still did her work however, and most of her behavior did not interfere with her assignments. Most of her impulsiveness was focused on getting the teacher to help her.

It was her relationship with her "cool" teacher that was so interesting. LL required a lot of personal attention, just like with her "uncool" teacher. This time, however, the teacher responded. And not only did she respond, but also they spoke to each other like they were friends. One example was when the teacher playfully pushed LL into the class and told her to "get in here." LL objected to her rudeness in a friendly, sarcastic manner. They bantered back and forth several times about such topics as the temperature of the room, the window not being opened, LL getting a question right after she had been ignored for the previous question, and the teacher accidentally stepping on LL's foot. For the last instance, LL told the teacher to "watch where you're going." Her tone was obviously joking. One time, the teacher was giving the class instructions when LL asked a question out of turn. The teacher asked if she could finish the instructions. LL responded by saying "Well you're the one who looked at. . " The teacher did not want to hear it and started screaming "Blah blah blah blah blah."

One would think that these two had a terrible in-class relationship, but the exact opposite was true. They simply joked around with each other like good friends. They bantered with each other out of playfulness. It was obvious by their tones and their facial expressions that they really liked each other. LL got the attention that she needed and the individual help that she required. In return, LL's impulsiveness was not disruptive and was channeled towards getting more help on her assignments.

Surveys

Both teachers wrote out rather detailed answers to their survey questions. They also both match up very well with the observations.

The "uncool" teacher begins by stating that LL is "a good student, but her major problem is impulsivity." She claims that LL blurts out whatever is on her mind at the time, no matter how inappropriate the content or timing. She blames LL's lack of self-control for most of her behavior problems. The teacher has problems keeping control in the class because of its size, so that may be a factor. LL's largest problem in the class is simply her blurting out.

Her "cool" teacher also claims that LL's impulsiveness and speaking out is her biggest problem. She recognizes that LL needs one-on-one assurance when she is working on new materials. LL wants to do well, and therefore needs a lot of encouragement from her teacher. As for the teachers unique approach to LL, she states that if "I don't pay attention to [LL] in a positive way, she will seek it in some other way." She acknowledges her in class through various methods such as: calling on her when she participates in class, encouraging her in a playful way when she doubts her own abilities, and asking questions of her but not giving her the answers.

Conclusions

LL is very impulsive. In both classes, she exhibited loud, attention- seeking behaviors. The main difference in her behavior was its focus. She sought out attention in a negative way with the "uncool" teacher. She did this by yelling out, walking around, and blatantly paying no attention to the lessons. She sought out attention in a positive way with the "cool" teacher, by asking the teacher for help and by personal interaction with the teacher.

The teacher-student relationship was the biggest trend that separated the two classrooms. Whereas the "uncool" teacher practically ignored LL, the "cool" teacher gave more personalized

attention to her than she gave to any other student. This culminated into a different type of relationship between the "cool" teacher and LL. They joked and playfully jabbed at each other, which made LL more engaged in the tasks at hand. All of their conversations were jovial in manner, even when the teacher was keeping LL in line. The conversations between LL and her "uncool" teacher were not friendly, and LL even got rude to the teacher. Her face showed looks of disdain when they talked. The few times LL sought out the teacher's help, she was not there to help her. For this reason, LL resorted to her friends for aid.

The results are fairly clear for LL. Although the type of personalized attention that her "cool" teacher gave to her is hard work, it really paid off. LL considered her "cool" so she behaved better, controlled herself more frequently, was on-task more often, and was much nicer to the teacher. Since she did not have the same type of relationship with the other teacher, she considered her "uncool", behaved poorly in her classroom, lacked control over her impulsiveness, was off-task more often, and was rude and was unwilling to listen to that teacher.

Results for LT

Observations

The most interesting thing about our observations of LT is that she was consistently off-task in all four observations, yet this does not mean that she had no differences in behavior. She was very off-task for her "uncool" teacher. Not only was she off-task, but her behaviors were disruptive. During one observation, the class was supposed to be watching a video. She rarely even looked at the television screen. She was busy talking to her neighbor for almost the entire time. She also passed make-up back and forth with another girl. LT also tried to talk to some girls across the room from her seat, which was very inappropriate. Her teacher had to whistle and point at them to get them to quiet down. Then LT began passing notes to her neighbor.

During the other observation with LT's "uncool" teacher, she was observed chewing gum, writing notes, passing notes by pretending to sharpen her pencil, and talking. She was also witnessed cheating off of another group during a team game. She continually made fun of one of her classmates, and at one point asked the girl "Can you do me a favor? SHUT UP!" The teacher told LT that her comment was rude, but she did not seem affected by the teacher's reprimand.

Her relationship with her "uncool" teacher was almost non-existent. Not once in either observation did she even acknowledge his presence. She did not look at him while he was talking, and she talked during all of his lessons. She was reprimanded on several occasions, but she seemed almost to ignore the teacher completely. The teacher also did not seem to make any extra effort to get involved with what she was doing.

She was also very off-task with her "cool" teacher. Her behaviors seemed less disruptive, and more like procrastination. During student presentations in one class, she sat very quietly and intently, whispering only a few comments under her breath. She laughed occasionally at the comments of other students, but generally she did not move. She looked around occasionally and sighed as if bored. Often she was seen yawning and staring out the window.

During the other observation, she also was off-task. She seemed somewhat bossy to some other students, but generally she was quiet and seemed to be daydreaming quite often. She exhibited such restless behaviors as sharpening her pencil and playing with the window shade. The only time she really got vocal was when she was asking her "cool" teacher for help on an assignment. She asked for help several times, and the teacher responded to her fairly quickly. Their interactions were positive and when the teacher left, LT worked quietly.

LT seemed to enjoy interacting with the teacher. She sought out help from the teacher when she needed it, and responded positively by doing her assignments after she received the

help. It was during the times when the teacher was doing other things, that LT showed signs of boredom and did not do her work.

Surveys

Both of the teachers wrote rather short survey answers about LT, nevertheless their responses were very interesting.

The survey that was turned in by her "uncool" teacher differed from every other survey received during this study. His survey was the only one that contrasted our field observations. The contrast between his survey and both of our observations in his classroom is very large. He simply states that "she tries to do work. Does not always understand. Is not a behavior problem, very nice." This was the complete opposite of what we saw. We saw her avoid work at all costs, and we saw no sign of her wanting to further understand the material being presented. She was very disruptive in class and was seen cheating, yelling across the room, passing notes and make-up, talking, and making fun of students. This last behavior also did not leave us with the impression that she was "very nice" in her "uncool" teacher's classroom.

LT's "cool" teacher started out by stating that she was "Quiet!" She mentions that when she does attempt to do work, she requires "a lot of one-on-one." She does not mention her apparent boredom, but she does talk about her interactions with other students as being inappropriate at times. She can "bully and be hateful when she wants." Overall, she feels that LT wants to please and will do anything that is asked of her.

Conclusions

LT's behavior was consistent in two respects. One is that she is very off-task in both classroom environments, and the other is that she can be rude to her fellow students. She also is

not a very good student when it comes to the amount of time she spends on doing work.

There was a difference in off-task behavior that was apparent between her behavior for her "cool" and "uncool" teachers. This was in the type of off-task behaviors she performed. For her "cool" teacher, she was generally quiet, but occasionally muttered something under her breath. Most of her off-task behavior was related to apparent boredom or attempted procrastination. Examples were that she doodled, daydreamed, and played with things. Only occasionally was she rude to other students, and she was never openly disruptive.

Her behavior for her "uncool" teacher was much worse in nature. She was not very quiet, and often was openly disruptive. The severity of her off-task behaviors were much greater. Examples were that she cheated, yelled, talked, passed items, and yelled at another student.

She also had very different relationships with the two teachers. She needed and sought out a lot of individual attention from her "cool" teacher. In fact, the only time she really was on-task was during and immediately after she talked with the teacher about the assignment. She genuinely seemed to like interacting with the "cool" teacher and their conversations had very positive tones.

On the other hand, she had practically no interactions at all with her "uncool" teacher. She did not seek out help, and she seemed totally uninterested with any lessons being presented or work being assigned. During the few times when the teacher acknowledged her because of misbehavior, she completely ignored him. They did not seem to have any sort of classroom relationship. This is shown also in his short, and apparently inaccurate survey answers.

Although neither teacher seemed to make a large impact in the time LT spent on-task, it is apparent that being with the teacher that she perceived to be "cool" was beneficial to her. She sought out help, and therefore did some work, as opposed to none. Her behaviors were also much less disruptive to the rest of the class when she was with the "cool" teacher.

Results for MA

Observations

MA was observed less than the regular twenty times. This was due to some complications that were not realized until it was too late. We both observed him with his "uncool" teacher, but when we went to his "cool" teacher's classroom, he was not there. His schedule stated that he had that teacher during that period, but they had made a switch that was not recorded in the guidance office computers. He had been in his "cool" teacher's class during the previous grading period. He apparently did not completely understand the directions on the initial student survey that asked which teacher that he had during that marking period was the "coolest." Therefore, we have no first hand observations of him with his "cool" teacher.

MA was very off-task in both observations with his "uncool" teacher. He quite frequently fidgeted and looked off into space. He rarely showed any signs of paying attention to the teacher, and he was very slow in getting to work on his assignments. During one observation, he walked to the front of the room without asking permission, and he stood by the pencil sharpener for a minute or two. He also did not get off of the floor after an overhead lesson and he did not take out his books. It was noted in both observations that he chewed on an eraser and looked to see if the teacher would notice that he was not working on the assignment.

He was also observed being rude to other students during both observations. During one observation, a fellow student asks the teacher a question and MA responded before the teacher. In the other observation, he laughed at a few people's comments and then he said something back to one of the students and was mildly scolded by the teacher. A girl in his class told the teacher that she did not "get" something, and MA retorted by stating "She doesn't get anything."

While he showed signs of politeness (saying "Ma'am" and "I'm sorry") with his "uncool" teacher, the general impression that he left with us was that he was a student who would do

anything to procrastinate. He was also rude to other students and moved slowly when asked to do something.

Surveys

Again, we have less data on MA than with the other subjects. This time, however, it is his "uncool" teacher that we are missing data from. His "cool" teacher wrote very detailed answers to the two survey questions. The "cool" teacher realized that his survey was all that we had to go on for his class, so he wrote as much as he could remember from the previous marking period.

The "uncool" teacher lost the initial survey. When we went to collect the surveys, we had to copy another survey for the teacher to complete. We then came back several days later, but the teacher still had not filled it out. Then our spring break occurred and when we tried one last time to collect the survey, the teacher was absent. By this time, it was time to present this project, so we made the decision to go ahead without it.

MA's "cool" teacher did a thorough job of describing his typical classroom behavior. He recalled that "[MA] behavior in [his] class was avoiding work at all costs." He mentioned several techniques that MA used to avoid work such as looking through his backpack, throwing away trash, and sharpening his pencil. He would even demonstrate these behaviors during tests. He mentioned that MA was rarely argumentative, but due to the fact that he did no work, he failed the class "with flying colors." He also mentioned the fact that MA would also "pick on others in an attempt to draw attention to himself."

He claimed that MA sought constant attention, so ignoring his antics was tried as an alternative way to get him to behave better and spend more time on-task. This did not seem to work.

Conclusions

Although we had limited information on MA, we did find some very strong trends in what we did have. Differing vastly from the other students, we found dramatic similarities between his behaviors with his "cool" and his "uncool" teacher.

First of all, he showed great procrastination efforts in both classrooms. His "cool" teacher mentioned several of his work-avoiding techniques, and we saw several of these during our observations of him with his "uncool" teacher. Sharpening his pencil was the clearest example of him stalling. We saw him do little or no work in both of our observations, while the "cool" teacher stated that MA failed because he just would not do any work.

Rudeness to other students was also a common trend with both his "cool" and the "uncool" teachers. In the observations, he got mildly scolded for responding to a student with a snide comment, and he made a rude remark to a student who did not understand something that the teacher was presenting. His "cool" teacher also noted that MA made fun of other students in class in order to draw attention to him.

In conclusion, MA showed practically no differentiation of behavior in the two classrooms. He behaved poorly for the "uncool" teacher, as well as the "cool" teacher. The results were completely different from the cases of the other four students studied. For MA, it seems as if teaching styles, or even the teachers themselves, make little difference to him in terms of behavior.

Discussion

The design of this study consists of five individual qualitative case studies. Our findings are based on subjective observations and student and teacher surveys. Therefore the validity of the results are limited within each case study. We cannot make any claims on significant correlations nor can we conclude any cause and effect relationships in general. However, we did find similar results among the case studies which suggests that significant patterns do exist.

The data shows that 4 out of the 5 participants exhibited more on-task behavior with their "cool" teacher than their "uncool" teacher. Therefore, our study suggests that being "cool" does indeed help a teacher manage normally disruptive students. We also noticed that the most common quality among these 4 cases studies was a positive relationship between the teacher and student. This leads us to believe that being a "cool" teacher is not about wearing designer clothing and speaking in slang but having a good relationship with the student.

Although, the participants did interact with their "uncool" teachers, the interactions were predominantly discipline related. It is difficult to assess in this study if these discipline-related interactions lead a student to label his or her teacher as "uncool" or whether it is the inappropriate behaviors a student exhibits with an "uncool" teacher that leads to constant discipline-related interactions. Nevertheless, our findings show that with "uncool" teachers, our participants had more difficulty staying on task and behaving appropriately.

Our study would have had more validity and reliability if we had better control of some of the extraneous variables. One variable we chose to ignore was the student's competency and enjoyment of the content in the classes we observed. Our participant's behaviors could have been influenced more by their level of understanding and enjoyment of the subject matter rather than the teacher. In JJ's case study, it is clear that he enjoys science and feels competent in it. Perhaps, he would have exhibited on-task behaviors regardless of the teacher. In future studies,

an assessment of the participant's grades in the class should help distinguish the factors that personal enjoyment of a subject content can have on classroom behavior. Another variable that we did not explore was the similarities and differences of classroom management styles of the "cool" and "uncool" teachers. A closer examination of this variable would have explained whether students behaved accordingly to the discipline strategies of the teacher or strictly on the teacher's "coolness." Another possibility is that these two factors are inter-related. It is possible that students perceive teachers who can effectively control their class as "cool" teachers and those who cannot control their class as "uncool" teachers. It is apparent that there is a need for further investigation in this area of study.

Implication

As noted earlier, our study was qualitative. However, our study is transferable in that it can be reproduced in different sites with expectations of similar results. Therefore, our study does suggest that students with behavior problems respond well to teachers that they perceive as "cool," and to achieve that "coolness" teachers should work on building positive relationships.

It is easy for a teacher to deal with a "troublemaker" by avoiding interactions with them or constantly restricting them of expression through punishments and rules. However, there is evidence that these typical teacher behaviors only reinforce the problems of an at-risk student. Arhar and Kromery (1993) suggests in their study that poor school performance, whether it be academic, social or behavioral performances, is largely related to the lack of connectedness students feel to the school, peer and faculty. This study supports this notion because improvement in school performance was evident when students who normally lack a sense of belonging had a positive connection with a teacher.

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Appendix

Survey for UVA Field Project

Jesse Sackett + Ho Chun

As part of our study, we are conducting interviews with the 7th grade teachers. We will be asking questions about specific students and their behavior. You might find the questions on this page to be vague but please write what you feel is important and necessary to note. I will be collecting these surveys Thursday. Thank You.

1.Please describe Michael Anderson's typical behavior in your class.

2.Is there anything in your class environment that you attribute these behaviors to?